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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2337
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001402

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/19/2016
TAGS: PGOV PREL UN IV
SUBJECT: GBAGBO OFFERS PROPOSALS, NOT SOLUTIONS

REF: ABIDJAN 1316

Classified By: Ambassador Aubrey Hooks, Reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a speech made December 19 evening, President Gbagbo offered five proposals designed to bring the country out of crisis: (1) direct talks with the Forces Nouvelles (FN) rebels aimed at encouraging them to disarm and free the country; (2) elimination of the Zone of Confidence; (3) creation of a national youth service program; (4) submission of a bill for general amnesty to the National Assembly; and (5) assistance to persons displaced by the war.

At this point these are simply proposals; it remains to be seen how much follow-through Gbagbo gives them. These proposals allow him to create the illusion that he is in control of the political process, while in fact they do not amount to much, and certainly are not a solution to Cote d'Ivoire's deep political crisis. As usual, Gbagbo does things by halves: he did not form a new government as expected, nor did he make mention of the Prime Minister, the identification process, UNOCI, or Licorne. Opposition PDCI dismissed his proposals as hot air and noted that Gbagbo continues to test the international community's resolve to enforce UNSC 1721. END SUMMARY

Proposals

¶2. (C) In a rather clumsy attempt to reach out to the rebels, Gbagbo announced his intent to establish a direct dialogue with the Forces Nouvelles aimed at disarming the rebels and liberating the country, language unlikely to reassure the FN leadership. Gbagbo maintained that after implementing Marcoussis, Accra and Pretoria, "Cote d'Ivoire has satisfied all of their demands." In a one-sided interpretation of events, he noted that the resolutions and accords have focused only on disarmament. His speech did not mention the issue of identification, which the rebels have stated is their principal demand. Secondly, giving no indication whether the UN or the FN had been consulted, the President proposed to eliminate the zone of confidence. Gbagbo asserted that there is no possibility of renewed hostility and Ivoirians are tired of the war. Thirdly, the President announced a plan to train, employ and support with lodging and a monthly stipend a cadre of 40,000 youth (including former combatants) and place them in 18-month public service jobs throughout the country. The President did not mention how the government would fund the national service proposal, although he contended money was available. Considering the government's fiscal difficulties (reftel), it seems unlikely that the money exists to train and support 40,000 youth. Fourth, although the National Assembly was dissolved in December 2005, Gbagbo announced his intention to submit a bill to the National Assembly offering general amnesty to ex-combatants and government officials for all crimes except crimes against humanity and economic crimes. He noted that the 2003 amnesty law was no longer in force. Finally, Gbagbo pledged to offer government assistance to persons displaced

by the war, but again did not explain how the government would implement or fund such a program.

Moving Away From the International Community and Toward Elections in July

¶3. (C) Characteristically dismissive of the work of the international community, Gbagbo noted at the beginning of his speech, "after 4 years and 3 months since the beginning of this crisis, none of the adopted solutions have brought peace....All those who have helped us: foreign powers, friendly states, international organizations, intermediaries of all ranks have done what they could to solve the crisis for us. We should not want them to do it without success....It is time that Ivorians appropriate for themselves, completely, the peace process." Gbagbo closed by noting that "the only way to power is through elections, and fair and free elections will be held in July 2007." According to the President, Articles 35 and 48 of the constitution allow the President to extend his mandate until elections are held, an interpretation with which the Constitutional Court concurs. COMMENT: This point raises the question of the legitimacy of the National Assembly and its ability to legislate a new general amnesty law. Although Gbagbo announced that elections will be held in July 2007, he did not offer a timeline to prepare the country. Considering that the identification process is stalled and the Forces Nouvelles have rejected the Prime Minister's proposal for the audiences foraines, elections by July are simply not in the realm of the realistic. END COMMENT

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Opposition Viewpoint

¶4. (C) Gbagbo made no mention of Prime Minister Banny or the expressed will of the international community as embodied in ¶1721. A senior opposition PDCI leader, Assistant Secretary General Michel Benoit Coffi confirmed today in a meeting at the Embassy the morning after the speech that Banny was neither consulted on the content of the speech nor on any aspect of these proposals during their talks in recent weeks. Mr. Coffi remarked, "Gbagbo knows his limits with the international community and he does not want to cross line. That's why he did not dissolve the government." Nonetheless, he commented Gbagbo continues to push against the line in order to see how far he can go without retribution. Coffi categorically dismissed all of Gbagbo's proposals as contradictory and unconstructive, saying that Gbagbo was "talking air." He assessed that eliminating the zone of confidence is a ploy to encourage UN and Licorne forces to leave Cote d'Ivoire since demanding their departure outright would overtly provoke the international community. He also noted that the national service program could be used to favor some ethnic groups over others or be used to employ those youth belonging to ruling FPI party-supported militias.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Gbagbo's speech falls far short of the most pessimistic expectation, namely firing the Prime Minister and forming a new government. The proposals themselves are vague and largely unrealistic. They are neither decrees nor concrete policies he intends, at this point at least, to implement unilaterally. A key example concerns the zone of confidence. While eliminating the zone of confidence under the right conditions would be productive in enabling the process to move forward, such conditions do not currently exist. It is broadly reported in the press and embassy sources note that government troops harass travelers entering the zone of confidence from the south. Earlier this week a group of traditional chiefs returning from Yamoussoukro after meeting with the Prime Minister were held by government

troops on the government side of the zone of confidence.
Clearly, the situation is too volatile to dissolve the zone.

¶6. (C) Gbagbo tends to do things by halves. The realization of these proposals depends on the Forces Nouvelles, the international community, and at least for the third and fifth proposals, significant funding, all of which are unrealistic.

Nonetheless, what Gbagbo did not say is just as important as what he did say. It does not appear that the President consulted with the Prime Minister, FN or international peacekeeping operations beforehand and except for the Forces Nouvelles, he does not mention them in his speech. While Gbagbo did not explicitly mention the Prime Minister or say that he will form a new government, Gbagbo's real intention is to provoke Banny into resigning by humiliating him and usurping his authority, thereby making the way for Gbagbo to form his own new government at some point, hoping a fatigued international community will allow him to do as he will.

Abidjan is waiting for Banny's response. END COMMENT
Hooks